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SOVIET ARMS SHIPMENTS TO CUBA IN
1978 AND TRENDS IN 1979

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Soviet Arms Shipments to Cuba in 1978
and Trends in 1979*

SUMMARY

1. The overall technical sophistication of identified Soviet military deliveries to Cuba increased substantially in 1978; the volume of deliveries rose for the fourth consecutive year to the highest level in more than a decade. This pattern of improved quality and high levels of arms shipments has continued in the first eight months of 1979. The strong upward trend in arms shipments began in early 1976, and reflects Soviet efforts to modernize Cuba's armed forces and to provide replacements for arms supplied by Havana to Third World countries. []

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2. Shipments in 1978 were highlighted by Havana's initial receipt of MIG-23 jet fighter aircraft in the spring. Another first during the past year was the delivery of 20 AN-26 short range cargo/troop transports. Delivery continued on major hardware items previously seen in Cuba, including T-62 tanks and ZSU-23/4 self-propelled anti-aircraft guns. Deliveries thus far in 1979 have included an F-class submarine (the first submarine in Cuba's navy) and two Turya-class ASW hydrofoil patrol boats. []

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* This paper was jointly produced by the Office of Economic Research and the Office of Political Analysis.

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3. The Soviet modernization effort has substantially enhanced Cuba's capability to conduct a more mobile mechanized warfare, including limited air assault operations. This contrasts sharply with Cuba's historic role of maintaining largely a "garrison force". The inflow of newer equipment provides Havana with a large and more sophisticated arms inventory at home while strengthening its ability to undertake offensive military operations in the Third World.

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DISCUSSION

4. The USSR has supplied almost all the military equipment Cuba has acquired since the early 1960s.* In value terms, total Soviet arms shipments to Cuba from 1961 through yearend 1978 equals \$1.55 billion,** including

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about \$150 million in 1978. On a volume basis, annual arms deliveries to Cuba in the six years following the 1962 missile crisis fluctuated widely, ranging from a low of 6,200 tons in 1968 to a high of 41,000 tons in 1967 (see the chart).

5. In the six-year period following the 1968 low, Soviet arms deliveries to Cuba remained between 10,000 and 12,600 tons. Beginning in 1975, deliveries grew steadily and by 1978 reached 22,400 tons -- the highest level in a decade. Arms deliveries in the first eight months of 1979 suggest that deliveries for the full year will roughly equal the high 1978 level. (For details of individual seaborne deliveries in 1978 and January-August 1979, see the appendix.)

Modernization and Offsets

6. While the USSR has for the most part provided for the gradual improvement in Cuba's military equipment inventory, the pace of modernization picked up in early 1976 and has accelerated since early 1978. As the modernization effort quickened, the Soviets began to offset deliveries of military equipment that Cuba was shipping to Angola. We believe offsets for arms shipped by Cuba to Third World countries has continued throughout the period and was

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underscored most recently by replacement of the small but critically important amount of military equipment supplied by Cuba to the Nicaraguan Sandinistas prior to the downfall of Somoza in July 1979. []

7. If Moscow had supported neither the modernization nor the offset program, arms shipments to Cuba during the past four years probably would have remained at about 12,500 ^{tons} annually, the upper end of the range which prevailed between 1969 and 1974. Instead, arms shipments rose for four consecutive years through 1978 to an average annual rate of more than 19,000 tons. []

Pattern of Arms Shipments

8. In 1978, a dozen Soviet ships delivered 22,400 tons of military equipment to Cuba. Thus far in 1979, six Soviet arms carriers with 10,900 tons of arms have arrived in Cuba. All but one of these shipments was exclusively military. In the one exception, the Soviet ship -- the Aleksandr Grin -- arrived in Cuba in December 1978 carrying ^{mostly} commercial cargo in its holds and military hardware on deck. []

9. In addition to these major seaborne deliveries, smaller amounts of military-related support equipment are carried in ships transporting commercial cargoes or in the cargo holds of Aeroflot IL-62 passenger aircraft, which operate daily

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between Moscow and Havana. The IL-62s may have been augmented recently by the arrival of the first long-range IL-76 jet cargo transport with some 20 tons of unspecified cargo in July. A second IL-76 flight to Cuba occurred in August. The aircraft flew on to Nicaragua, probably with humanitarian aid. Despite the overall air activity, the cargo capacity of aircraft currently operating to Cuba remains almost negligible when compared with seaborne arms deliveries; aircraft, however, can provide quick emergency delivery of critical weapons or parts.

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12. Mariel (64 kilometers west of Havana) remains Cuba's primary port for the handling of military equipment. Over the past few years, however, Havana has been used with increasing frequency because its pierside facilities can more easily handle heavy equipment. For the first time in several years, one arms carrier offloaded most of its cargo at Isabela (about 240 kilometers east of Havana) and another offloaded arms at Nuevitas (about 470 kilometers east of Havana).

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Types of Equipment

13. We believe the bulk of military deliveries to Cuba in 1978 and thus far in 1979 consisted of small arms, ammunition, assorted military trucks, and jeeps. In addition to these standard shipments, Havana received initial deliveries of MIG-23 fighter aircraft, AN-26 troop/cargo transports, and an F-class submarine.

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MIG-23s were seen for the first time at San Antonio de los Banos airport in Havana province.* Photography on 22 May identified 12 MIG-23 [redacted] [redacted] airport. To date a minimum of 10 Floggers have flown. The MIG-23 is the first ground attack aircraft in the Cuban Air Force able to complete a fully-loaded round trip to Caribbean littoral nations. No [redacted] [redacted] been identified.

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15. Besides the MIG-23s, Cuba has also received additional numbers of fighters already in inventory (16 MIG-21s and 4 MIG-17s) and initial deliveries of the MI-8 assault helicopter and the USSR's twin-turboprop AN-26 transports. With the delivery and assembly of the MI-8 assault helicopters in the Spring of 1978, a Cuban Air Force unit, probably a squadron and the first of its kind in Cuba, was formed. The unit was moved to Cienfuegos Airfield and one of its missions probably includes training and tactics for combat operations in Angola. Twenty AN-26s have been delivered to date, with the first five arriving in the fall of 1978. The AN-26 significantly enhances Cuba's short range cargo/troop airlift capacity: the aircraft has a radius of 810 nm and can carry either 38 lightly armed troops or 4 tons of equipment

* For a more detailed chronology of the year long reporting on delivery of MIG-23s to Cuba see the Central Intelligence Agency's RPM-78-10438J, 24 November 1978, New Aircraft in Cuba.

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19. Other modern equipment delivered to Cuba in the past 20 months has included additional units of items first identified in Cuba in 1976; T-62 tanks, ZSU-23/4 self-propelled antiaircraft guns, the BM-21 multiple rocket launcher, the SA-7 Grail surface-to-air missile, and the AT-3 Sagger anti-tank missile. At least nine shipments since January 1978 have included components for Cuba's SA-3 missile sites. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

20. Soviet efforts to modernize the Cuban military and to offset Havana's arms shipments to Third World will continue

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so long as the political goals and strategic needs of the two nations dovetail. Each of the armed services is likely to benefit from ongoing modernization, with the Navy as the major beneficiary. On a quantitative basis, the current cycle of increased arms deliveries may be at or close to a peak. Nevertheless, the Soviets have the capability to shift priorities and to quickly raise the level of deliveries to any particular arms recipient. []

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21. Future Soviet deliveries for the Cuban army are likely to consist primarily of additional quantities of the newer ground equipment Havana began receiving in 1976. Most of the future fighter aircraft deliveries are likely to be MIG-21 J, K, and L models already in the Cuban airforce. Additional MIG-23s would be a logical complement to the small number now in Cuba [] has denied that Cuba will receive more. The USSR is aware of US concern about ground-attack aircraft in Cuba. The reference made by a Cuban official last fall about the possible delivery of the MIG-25 Foxbat was subsequently denied by a Soviet official but the potential remains. []

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22. The USSR appears intent on measured improvement of Cuba's small navy during the next few years. The delivery of the F-class submarine, two Turya-class ASW patrol boats and

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